History of the Livingston County Illinois Home & Community Education Organization

By:

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Foreword

The Livingston County Home & Community Education Organization was formed in 1918. In 2026, the group decided to disband.

One of the long-time members asked me to write a short history book about this group. Fortunately, she has a rare copy of the 1968 booklet titled ***Golden Anniversary of the Livingston County Homemakers Extension Association 1918-1968.***

Materials were extracted from this 1968 booklet to write this short history book. Materials from the archives of the Pontiac Daily Leader were used from the 1993 (75th Anniversary) and 2018 (100th Anniversary) editions of this newspaper.

The rare 1968 book was scanned and uploaded to Archive.org for permanent digital preservation. It can be accessed at https://tinyurl.com/n5ee62ym.

This organization was formed in 1918 to provide educational information to women. Ironically, many of the reasons the organization was founded had disappeared. The educational needs of 1918 were very different from those of 2026.

Electricity, modern appliances, improved transportation, higher levels of education, and instant access to information through computers and smart phones transformed everyday life. The Livingston County Home Community Education Association had accomplished the mission for which it had been created.

After serving the county for 108 years, it quietly closed not because it had failed, but because the world around it had changed.

Dale C. Maley

2026

Acknowledgments

Many thanks go to Rita Schaefer for providing a copy of the very rare 1968 book celebrating the 50th Anniversary of this organization.

Thanks also to the other members of this group who reviewed the manuscript and suggestions for improving this story.

Many thanks also go to my sister-in-law, Judith K. Wells for proofreading the manuscript.

CHAPTER 1

Background of the Illinois Extension System

Land-Grant Colleges

On July 2, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln signed the Morrill Land-Grant Act into law. The act granted each state public land to help establish colleges devoted to agriculture, mechanical arts, engineering, and military science.

In 1867, the Illinois General Assembly accepted the federal land grant and created the Illinois Industrial University at Urbana. The university opened in 1868 and was renamed the University of Illinois in 1885.

In 1887, the Hatch Act established agricultural experiment stations at land-grant colleges. Federal funding allowed researchers to study crops, livestock, soils, insects, drainage, and other agricultural problems affecting farmers.

Taking Research to the People

The land-grant colleges educated students, but many farmers and homemakers would never attend college. Congress recognized that the benefits of university research should also reach ordinary citizens.

Agricultural experiment stations published bulletins describing their latest discoveries, but a better system was needed to teach people how to apply the new information.

The Cooperative Extension Service

In 1914, the Smith-Lever Act created the Cooperative Extension Service. Extension agents took university research directly to people in every county, providing practical education through demonstrations, meetings, publications, and personal assistance.

Over time, Extension developed three major educational programs. The first category was the Agricultural Extension. It focused on crop production, livestock, soils, drainage, insects, farm management, and related agricultural subjects.

The second category was Home Economics (Home Extension). It focused on nutrition, food preservation, sewing, child development, household management, health, and family life. This program eventually evolved into today's Home and Community Education (HCE).

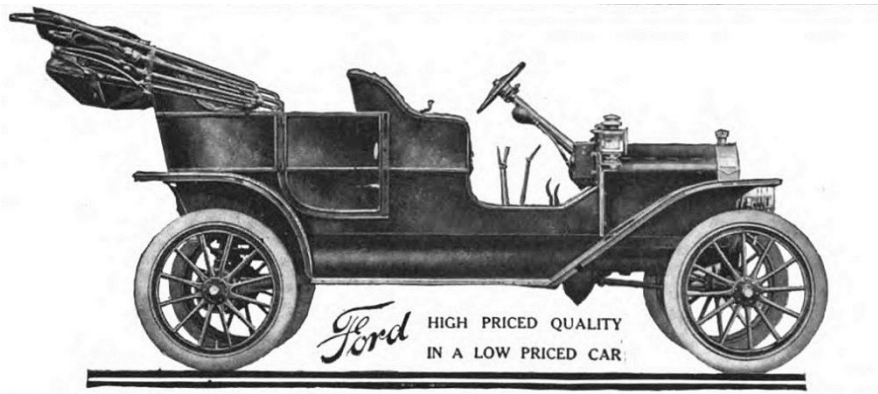
The third category was 4-H Youth Development. It focused on educational programs for boys and girls that developed leadership, citizenship, and practical life skills.

As a result, county Extension offices served much more than farmers. Their educational programs reached farm families, homemakers, youth, and eventually residents of towns and cities throughout Illinois.

CHAPTER 2

Life in 1918

Early automobiles were so expensive that only wealthy businessmen or medical doctors could afford them. Henry Ford's Model T, introduced in 1908, was revolutionary because it lowered the price of automobiles so the average family could afford to buy one.



By about 1920, almost all families in towns had replaced their horse-and-buggies with cars. The transition from horses to cars only took about 12 years for city dwellers.

Farmers were much slower to transition from their horses to internal combustion-powered tractors. It took over 30 years for most farmers to replace their horses with tractors.

The 1919 Prairie Farmer directory book for Livingston County reported the average farm size was 160 acres. Almost all farmers raised livestock in addition to field crops like corn, soybeans, wheat, oats, and alfalfa.

Because farming was so labor-intensive in that era, most farm families had many children to help on the farm. Most farm boys finished 6th grade in their local County School, then they started helping their father full-time on the farm.

Almost all rural and city dwellers had gardens, and canning was commonly used to preserve food grown in them.

Telephones were becoming common in many rural homes, while radios were beginning to appear in American homes. There was no TV, no computers, no Internet, and no cell phones.

Most homes had no indoor plumbing. Wood- or coal-cook stoves were common. Home refrigeration consisted of an icebox or a cellar. There were no electrically powered freezers. Home canning was a necessity, not a hobby.

Electricity was still unavailable on many farms until the Rural Electrification program in the late 1930s.

Most women baked bread at home. Nearly all of a family's clothing was mended, and much was sewn at home.

Safe food preservation could literally prevent illness or death.

On farms, boys often quit school after finishing the 6th grade in a country school so they could help their father full-time on the farm. Rural farm girls usually just finished the 8th grade at their country school. In town, very few boys finished high school. Only a handful of girls finished high school.

In 1920, most young couples married in their early twenties. The typical bride was about 21 years old and the groom about 25. Many had completed only a country school education before beginning married life on a farm or in a small town.

Young wives were eager to learn new skills to improve family life, but there was no practical way for them to do so.

CHAPTER 3

New Organization in Livingston County in 1918

In 1968, the Livingston County Homemakers Extension published a booklet recounting the history of this group from 1918 to 1968 as part of its 50th Anniversary. The story of the founding of the group is repeated below.

Early History

On March 20, 1918, a new organization came to Livingston County. Under the guidance and encouragement of the Livingston County Soil Improvement Association (the forerunner of the Livingston County Farm Bureau) a group of women representing thirteen townships met and laid the groundwork for the Livingston County Home Improvement Association.

At the first organization meeting, Mrs. Charles Froebe of Chatsworth was elected president of the association. Mrs. Hattie Fox, Dwight, first vice-president; Mrs. Edward Fox, Ancona, second vice-president; Miss Electa Whalen, Pontiac, secretary; and Miss Ida Tindall, Pontiac, treasurer. Mrs. Roy Bishop, wife of the Farm Adviser for the Soil and Crop Improvement Association, was made an honorary member of the board of directors. Four directors were appointed, making nine members to be present at each meeting. Mrs. John C. Mies, Avoca; Mrs. Bert Carter, Indian Grove; Mrs. Della East, Esmen; and Mrs. F. J. Spaulding, Pontiac; were appointed to complete the first Board of Directors. In going over the early minutes it comes to light that this loyal group of nine women held many meetings in forming the foundations for our organization. Six meetings were held from March 20 to May 15 and in 1918 it took longer than one-half hour to drive from Chatsworth or Ancona to Pontiac.

The first "home" of the association was in the offices of Dr. Midleton, renting for $12 a month. Miss Florence Swan, a Home Economics graduate was employed as Adviser to the group on April 3. It was decided to purchase a Ford Sedan for $830.27, to enable

Miss Swan to travel around the county to teach homemakers the skills they wished to develop. Donations from the Soil Improvement Association and various civic minded people aided the slender treasury of the Livingston County Home Improvement Association. A bank balance of $1500 was needed to have an adviser in the county, so a loan of $800 was secured from the Pontiac State Bank, signed by the members of the original board making them personally responsible! Miss Thelma Patterson was hired as the first office secretary.

(Note from secretary book) August 21, 1918. "Small group present because of threshing season."

In September a county membership committee was appointed. No October meeting was held because of the flu. In April of 1919, a $500 donation from the supervisors temporarily relieved the financial situation.

The first Annual Meeting was held March 20, 1919, showing 403 charter members. Of these 57 were unpaid, 5 deceased, 6 moved, 5 miscellaneous removals making a membership of 528. (We can't make it add up either, but these are the figures in the Secretary's Book.—The Editors.) The Annual Meeting was changed to the third Wednesday in April. At this meeting Mrs. Hattie Fox was elected president and the name of the organization was officially adopted as Livingston County Home Bureau. An indication of county wide concern is shown by the quote "the members voted against building a Sanatorium in cooperation with other counties, as they felt we should have our own facilities."

By 1921 the members were responsible for placing Hot Lunch in 45 rural schools. A three year program of work was adopted and Miss Lita Bane gave Livingston County credit for being the first county to adopt a program of work. Miss Bane speaking at a county meeting said, "The adviser was not to teach housekeeping unless requested, but was to teach healthful, scientific living. Homemakers need to be a finer kind of people than other professions. Although financial compensation for homemaking is not in proportion to labor, the human compensations cannot be had by those in other professions.

Your home life has more effect on your efficiency than anything else that can touch your life."

June 1921 saw the women staffing a tent at the Pontiac Chautauqua to tell others about their organization. Evidence of the belief and loyalty of the early founders is indicated by the personal risk each took. It is recorded matter of factly in the minutes; "On November 16, 1921, a 3 months note for $200, payable at any time, was signed by Mrs. John C. Mies, Mrs. Hattie Fox, Miss Swan, Mrs. Charles Efft and Mrs. George Holland." Nothing to go on except their nerve!

Home Bureau members were among the first to learn about the convenience of homemaking helps, such as Certo which was introduced in 1922. In September of that year Miss Anna Searl was hired as Home Adviser and Miss Evelyn Hallam began 26 years of loyal service as office secretary.

In order to spread homemaking skills to the coming generation, in 1925 we began to sponsor the 4-H program in the county. Since then innumerable women remember with pride their years and accomplishments in 4-H club work. The 4-H club program as the youth section of our county's Extension Program has had the complete financial support and loyalty of the Home Makers Association. To further enrich the 4-H program a district camp was established on Rock Creek in Kankakee county in 1945.

Home Bureau women have always been ready to volunteer their services when needed. In 1948, after serious outbreak of Polio in this county, Home Bureau conducted the Polio drive. Their success in this and succeeding years won for them a commendation from the state Polio committee. In recognition of the success, Mrs. Mildred Watters of Livingston County was invited to speak at a national meeting in Indiana. Promotion of the Heart Fund and the distribution of information on Heart problems has been a part of the program of Livingston County Homemakers Extension Association.

Countless women have volunteered many hours of service to their organization and listing them and their contributions would take another book. When you think of all the hours of work spent in 4-H Club Leadership, in the 4-H Fair kitchen, the Hobby Shows, Music

and Drama Festivals, Local Leader training schools and countless others; a mere "Thank You" is not enough.

In order to progress, from time to time we must make a change. In July of 1956 a major change was made in our organization. In order to comply with federal laws affecting the Extension Service we organized a Livingston County Extension Council. This group directed the scope of the educational portion of our program. July 1, 1962, in order to coordinate the work of the Council and the Home Bureau Board, our state organization changed their name to Illinois Homemakers Extension Federation. A new County Constitution was written and adopted in 1962 giving our organization its third name, that of Livingston County Homemakers Extension Association. Although we have been under three different names, the aims of our organization has always been the betterment of our homes and communities.

As we close our first Fifty Years, we look forward with pleasure to continuing to learn of the new technologies being developed to aid us in our chosen profession as Homemakers and to continue our service to our communities.

What was Certo back in 1922?

One of the first modern kitchen conveniences promoted by Home Bureau was Certo, a liquid fruit pectin introduced in 1922. It made home jelly and jam making faster, more reliable, and less likely to fail, becoming another example of how Extension brought new scientific advances into rural kitchens.

Financial Model of Founding Group

The only revenue sources for this group were dues from members, donations from businesses or other civic groups, and their own fundraising activities.

The major expenses for this group were paying a recent college graduate to be the County Advisor and covering the cost of a car so they could drive around the county and teach educational classes.

Like any new organization, they started with no money in their bank account. They did not have enough money to hire their first home extension advisor. The nine directors took out a bank loan for $800. Each of the nine directors was personally responsible for paying back the loan. The $800 loan amount in 1918 would be equivalent to $17,500 in today's dollars.

The new organization also received a $500 donation from the Livingston County Board.

Why the Group was Successful at the Beginning

The major reason this new group was successful was that it filled an educational need no one else was meeting. The group provided practical information that every member could use immediately.

Another key factor was that affordable automobiles allowed the Home Advisor to reach every township group and teach classes. Low-cost automobiles also allowed members to attend county-wide meetings.

In that era, townships were a bigger focus than the whole county. This group formed clubs at the township level, aligning with the community's focus at the time.

Businesses and the County Board also provided key financial support for the group. The University of Illinois also provided many support functions for this group.

Many women stepped up to provide leadership in setting up the township clubs and keeping them active and relevant to their members.

Similarity Between the Home Extension Group and the Annual Pontiac Chautauquas

A large public event called the Chautauqua was held in Pontiac from 1898 until 1929. Huge crowds attended this annual two-week event. For example, in 1905, over 107,000 people attended the 16-day event.

These events were so popular because, in that era, there were very few educational opportunities for adults and entertainment options. People enjoyed learning about new things and the different types of entertainment.

The Home Extension group participated in these annual Chautauqua events, delivering educational lectures and demonstrations.

The Home Extension group met the same unfilled need for more educational opportunities. The Chautauqua lasted only about two weeks, while the Home Extension provided new educational information year-round.

Public interest in the Pontiac Chautauqua Assemblies began to wane in the late 1920s. Radio and motion pictures became available to the general public. The Great Depression began in 1929, and attendance declined as well. The last Pontiac Chautauqua was in 1929.

Both organizations flourished because they filled an educational need before radio, television, and the Internet made information instantly available.

CHAPTER 4

Reflections on the First 50 Years

The 1918 to 1968 Fiftieth Anniversary booklet has memories of the Home Extension from several prominent Livingston County citizens.

Lucile Goodrich (1906-1985)

She was the first woman to hold the position of Livingston County Superintendant of Schools from 1947 to 1971. Her thoughts are below.

> My memories of the Livingston County Home Bureau and the Homemaker's Extension Association are chiefly a result of my association and cooperation with Home Bureau sponsored programs in the schools.
>
> In the late 1930's, I was teaching in a one-room school. Mrs. Flora Hilti, one of the energetic and determined presidents of the Livingston County Home Bureau at that time, Miss Jessie Campbell, the Home Adviser, and local units made a concerted drive to get at least one hot dish on the luncheon menu of every school child.
>
> In this they were very successful. In rural schools all over the county, teachers and students prepared soup, hot cocoa, or stew on a hot plate; parents in the district took turns bringing in one or more hot dishes; soup or other foods carried from home in fruit jars were heated in a pan of water on top of the room heater; or if no other facility was available, potatoes were baked inside the room heater door. Many humorous and near tragic incidents resulted, but the hot dish became standard.
>
> Later, as an elementary principal in a four-room school, I experienced WPA lunches prepared with surplus commodities including such things as powdered milk, pinto beans, and dried fruits and once again, the Home Bureau

assisted by suggesting possible balanced meals and palatable recipes which incorporated the surplus foods.

As a citizen, I remember other programs of the organization. Through the Home Bureau, women learned better methods of preservation of food going from hot pack, to cold pack, to freezing. Beautiful and dramatic Miss Fannie Brooks, Health Extension Worker from the University of Illinois, and a former resident of Livingston County, taught us to "Think Tall and Stand Tall."

Home Advisers like Jessie Campbell, Arlene Wolfram, and Mrs. Helen Sullivan, and devoted local 4-H and Home Bureau leaders taught 4-H Club girls and their mothers to make their own clothes, redecorate their rooms, cook a balanced meal, and enjoy wholesome recreation.

With the coming of electricity, rural people have, within a period of some twenty years, used their intelligence and training to solve the problems of no water supply, outdoor plumbing, coal stoves, and kerosene lamps. Today, the rural area is truly a good place to be. The Homemaking Extension Service continues to meet the needs of today's homemaker in the modern world in added new areas such as safe driving, furnishing for today's homes, estate planning, and fair-leasing practices.

As county superintendent of schools, I remember with deep appreciation the past contributions of the now Homemaker's Extension Association to the continuing educational program of Livingston County and look to ever better programs in the future. Our schools' association with the organization has been both pleasant and rewarding.

Mr. Glenn Antrim

He was from Rooks Creek and served a long time on the Livingston County Board of Supervisors starting in 1921. His thoughts are below.

He recounted that in 1922, the Livingston County Board of Supervisors voted to give the Home Extension $700. He also recounted that in 1925, the County Board voted to give the Home Extension $1,000.

These appropriations demonstrated that the County Board supported the efforts of the home extension.

Mr. O. D. Brissenden

He was the former Executive Secretary of the Illinois Agricultural Association. His thoughts are below.

We were in the midst of a world wide depression which bore especially heavy on the farm home and farm business. Money was scarce, prices of farm products were low, pessimism was rampant throughout the country and yet they stayed true to their fundamental belief in agriculture and a better tomorrow.

Their interest in youth was evidenced by the thought, energy and money they put into 4-H club work.

Their interest in the home was apparent as they eagerly sought for new ideas to brighten and improve it within their limited income.

Extension meetings were well attended as they knew there was the proper atmosphere for new ideas as well as the companionship with others who were eager for self improvement.

Rural electrification reminds me of a meeting in which the celebrated Fannie Brooks had given a brilliant review of the advantages that would come to the over-burdened farm mother with the advent of electricity and running water in the home.

She even gave us the total number of pounds of water that had to be pumped and carried into the house to do a week's

washing for a family of six. I got a good laugh from the intensely interested audience when I suggested that she should double the amount as you always had to carry the darn suds out after the washing was finished.

At least that had been my experience as a boy.

Paul T. Wilson

He was a Farm Advisor. His thoughts are below.

Those of us who were fortunate enough to live thru the early years of extension have witnessed the modern miracle of the 20th century. The Expanding of The Food Supply Faster Than the Growth of the Population.

The farm land area of Illinois and U.S.A. were pretty well occupied by the early 20th century. We had 3,800 farms in Livingston County averaging 160 acres in size. Since then, farms have constantly grown larger in size, fewer in number, and, except for the drought years, more productive.

Farm income and living conditions have always been a problem. Prices were stable and at or above parity during the 1910-18 period, but this had not been the history before—or since. Hence, Federal Legislation to provide for County Agricultural and Home Demonstration agents was one of the first pieces of Farm Legislation passed in the 20th Century.

The early advisers traveled over dirt and mud roads in Model T Fords or by horse and buggy to visit with farm families that read by kerosene lights, carried their water by hand, and farmed with horses.

The Model T gave way to the V-8; dirt roads were first graveled, then black topped. Electricity brought light for reading; heat for cooking and ironing; and power for pumping water, to run refrigerators and sewing machines, and a host of farm jobs. The tractor has replaced the horse. In fact, the power made available through electricity and the

ever increasing size of tractors, has been largely responsible for the ability of the farm family to enjoy a reasonable level income by constantly increasing the size of operation from around 160 acres in 1917 to about 275 acres in 1967—or over 2 acres per year.

The cow, the sow, the hen, the long row farm garden and fruit trees were the basis of the family living in 1917. Many hours of personal service were given, hundreds of meetings were held by extension advisers to help families produce and preserve home produced food. Today the fruit trees are gone, the Grade A milk is delivered to your farm, eggs are purchased at super markets, and home produced meat is rare, although many farmers do have freezers. We eat better than ever, and we buy this food cheaper than we can produce it at home, saving our valuable labor to produce more to sell or to spend more time with our family or on community affairs.

CHAPTER 5

Most Prominent Early Leader

Elsie Wheaton Mies

The 1968 booklet recounts that Mrs. Elsie Wheaton Mies was the most prominent leader of the group. Her biography from the booklet is shown below.

One of the great leaders of women's farm organizations of America was Mrs. Elsie Wheaton Mies of Livingston County.

Mrs. Mies was born November 14, 1880 in Hinkley, DeKalb County, Illinois, the daughter of Amelia Holdenhouse and George L. Wheaton. She graduated from DeKalb Normal School. On August 28, 1909, she was married to Henry J. Mies of Saunemin, Illinois. Mr. Mies was a charter member of Livingston County Crop Improvement Association and also one of the founders of the Illinois Agricultural Association. Mr. Mies was killed in an auto-train accident near Jacksonville, Illinois, October 19, 1932 and Mrs. Mies was severely injured. She was president of Illinois Home Bureau Federation and the Mies' were going to a County Home Bureau Annual meeting where Mrs. Mies was to be guest speaker. After a long and colorful career in state and national Farm and Home Bureaus, Elsie Wheaton Mies died in Urbana, February 22, 1949.

Mrs. Mies, a descendant of the founder of Wheaton College, was a school teacher in Saunemin, Illinois prior to her marriage. As a bride she moved to the Mies Homestead north of Saunemin. She was one of the first farm women in the area to drive a Model T Ford. About 1920 the Henry Mies family moved to 220 W. Henry St., Pontiac, Illinois.

She was an original member of Livingston County Home Improvement Association and one of the women largely responsible for its early organization. She was fourth president of Livingston County Home Bureau from 1922 to 1924 and also served in many other capacities as a board member.

Mrs. Mies was president of Illinois Home Bureau Federation from 1930 to 1933. She was national president of the Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau Federation from 1940 to 1941, and served as vice-president three years prior to her presidency.

She was one of the originators of the Illinois Citizenship Conference that is held each June for the leaders of the County Extension Associations. Mrs. Mies was in great demand as a speaker. She traveled extensively in Illinois and in the United States and Canada in connection with her work as an officer of the Illinois Home Bureau Federation and the Associated Women of the American Farm Bureau.

To quote Mrs. Kathryn Van Aken Burns, former State Leader of Home Economics Extension in Illinois, "Mrs. Mies had striking ability as a committee member in bringing a discussion to a point, summing up discussion and moving on to new areas of thought. Her membership on national committees often brought her in touch with members of Congress and members of the Cabinet. Her view was never confined to a feminist one and as the only woman on many national committees relating to problems of the day, her ideas were listened to with respect."

Illinois farm women will long remember Mrs. Mies' many talks before county and state meetings. She had a straight forward and direct method of speaking and that was spiced with a fine sense of humor. She had a great capacity for understanding and used her early training as a teacher in effective leadership to promote the welfare of farm men and women. Elsie Mies was a kind and thoughtful individual. She was without pretense or affectation and while her approach to problems was always of a practical nature, she retained the gift of inspiration.

Quoting from the 1968 Illinois Homemakers Extension Federation Handbook. "Because Mrs. Elsie Mies was such a strong supporter of women's interest in the affairs of community, county, state and nation she was always aware of the need for women to assemble to hear speakers of merit. After her death, women of the state collected a fund and this fund was invested. The interest from this investment is used each year to obtain an outstanding speaker for Elsie Mies Day during Citizenship Conference."

Elsie Mies loved young people. She said, "The only thing wrong with teen-agers is that I am not one of them." She was program counselor for the first Youth-Adult Conference in 1937 at East Bay Camp, Lake Bloomington. Mrs. Mies continued as program counselor for five encampments conducting a seminar on "Foundation for Christians Homes." This was the beginning of Rural Youth Camp. Her classes in the library were always filled to capacity and as she walked from the library to the dining hall for meals, she was completely surrounded by Rural Youthers, just like the Pied Piper, talking and counseling as she went.

Mrs. Mies had three daughters and one son. Helen, a former Illinois Home Adviser, is Mrs. Edward Schilf of Washington D.C.; Mrs. Robert (Jeanette) Bixler lives at Richland, Washington; Mrs. Kenneth (Henrietta) Babb is a resident of Champaign, Illinois. Her son, Wheaton, lives near Boston.

Livingston County has reason to be proud that it contributed a truly great leader, Mrs. Elsie Wheaton Mies, not only to the Cooperative Extension Service in both Agricultural and Home Economics Extension, but also one of the earliest advocates of the larger field of adult education. She was one of the first to realize that human welfare depends on the educated individual and on his continuing interest in self improvement. She herself, with her active mind, her eagerness for new books, new experiences and new ideas was a living example of the fact that education is never finished but is life itself.

CHAPTER 6

An Aim for the Home Maker in 1936

Per the 1968 booklet, another leader was Juliet Lita Bane (1887-1957).

She was one of the giants of home economics education in Illinois and nationally. She was born and raised in Long Point Township, Livingston County. She graduated from the University of Illinois. She later became Head of the Department of Home Economics at the University of Illinois in 1936.

She authored "An Aim for the Homemaker," which became the Home Bureau aim adopted throughout Illinois and was widely used across the United States.

She was a nationally recognized educator, author, and speaker who influenced the development of home economics education.

The 1968 booklet recounts her authorship of the “An Aim for the Homemaker.”

> It was in 1936 that she returned to her first love, the University of Illinois, as head of Home Economics. During her administration, the Department grew in size and in scope of courses offered. During her administration, the legislature provided funds to build a new Home Economics building.
>
> When entering this building, called Bevier Hall, one is greeted by a plaque—AN AIM FOR THE HOMEMAKER—as written by Miss Bane and widely used throughout the United States. The aim was written as a result of Miss Bane's determination to find a comprehensive definition of the home.

Illinois women adopted it as their Home Bureau aim—

To have the home
Economically sound
Mechanically convenient
Physically healthful
Morally wholesome
Mentally stimulating
Artistically satisfying
Socially responsible
Spiritually inspiring
Founded on mutual affection and respect

CHAPTER 7

Past Presidents 1918-1968

Past Presidents

		ADDRESS
1918-	Mrs. Charles Froebe	Chatsworth
1919-1920	Mrs. Hattie Fox	Dwight
1920-1922	Mrs. John C. Mies (Avoca Unit)	Fairbury
1922-1925	Mrs. Henry J. Mies	Pontiac
1925-1927	Mrs. Maurine Vincore	Rutland
1927-1928	Mrs. S. L. Knight	Saunemin
1928-1931	Mrs. Merlin Strayer (Waldo Unit)	Gridley
1931-1936	Mrs. Gordon Fillingham (Owego Unit)	Pontiac
1936-1937	Mrs. Maurice Phillips	Flanagan
1937-1940	Mrs. Clarence Brownsey	Dwight
1940-1944	Mrs. Lyle Husted (Amity Unit)	Cornell
1944-1946	Mrs. Burkhart Hilti (Union Unit)	Odell
1946-1948	Mrs. C. R. Watters	Dwight
1948-1950	Mrs. Clarence Bennett	Chatsworth
1950-1952	Mrs. Lloyd Pampel	Graymont
1952-1954	Mrs. John Beutke	Long Point
1954-1956	Mrs. Leonard Ketterer (Sunbury Unit)	Cornell
1956-1958	Mrs. John Mortimore (Owego Unit)	Pontiac
1958-1960	Mrs. Leslie D. Mies	Fairbury
1960-1964	Mrs. Raymond E. Hanley (Union Unit)	Saunemin
1964-1966	Miss Crystal Thompson (Rooks Creek Unit)	Pontiac
1966-1968	Mrs. Howard Jenkins	Long Point

CHAPTER 8

Major Accomplishments between 1918 and 1968

- Hot lunch program for country schools
- Chautauqua participation
- Home demonstrations
- 4-H sponsorship
- Polio campaign
- Heart Fund
- Leader training
- Hobby shows
- Music and Drama Festivals

CHAPTER 9

The Organization Matures 1968-2026

The Pontiac Daily Leader is the newspaper that has the most articles about home extension units in Livingston County. A search for the key phrase of “home extension” found 2,143 articles from 1918 until 2026.

The same search found 1,889 articles from 1968 until 2026. The bulk of these articles are meeting notices for the various township units of the home extension. They document the many different educational programs the various township units conducted for their members.

75th Anniversary in 1993

The January 16, 1993 Leader published an article about the reorganization of the Extension Service.

> Daily Leader
> By Marion Shier
> Crops System Unit Educator
>
> On May 8, 1914 President Woodrow Wilson made the Cooperative Extension Service a reality by signing the Smith-Lever bill. The bill proposed a "people's" University, a massive effort to take education directly to the people who needed it. The idea of county advisers to instruct local people on the latest, most scientific techniques in agriculture and domestic duties, developed over several decades, refined by trial and error.
>
> The Cooperative Extension Service of the University of Illinois provides education programs and unbiased research-based information to help Illinois residents improve their quality of life, develop skills and solve problems, by helping you put knowledge to work. Over 3,700 individuals

benefitted from Extension's services from Sept. 1, 1991 to Aug. 31, 1992.

Because of reoccurring budgeting problems of Illinois Cooperative Extension, a revitalization plan was developed. The University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service has reorganized its structure. The major changes were the formation of Extension Units and Education Centers. Extension Units replace the county office structure. The Extension Unit can be a single or multiple county area, depending on availability of funds.

The budget of the Extension Unit must support the operational costs of the unit and all unit salaries. Because of the successful Extension Tax Referendum in November 1991, Livingston County has a single county unit office and staff.

Meet Your Staff

Greeting you upon entering our office is our full-time secretary, Betsy Kridner. She is a native of Indiana and has been with us over five years. With all of our changes, Betsy has been a constant to help keep our office going. We will be hiring a part-time secretary in the near future.

The Livingston County Unit office is staffed with a Unit Leader, Ruth Hensen, who will be responsible for needs assessment, all fiscal and budgeting matters, staffing, program coordination and facilitation.

Ruth, a native of Iowa, has served the people of Livingston County for 25 years. She received her bachelor's degree in home economics from Iowa State University and her master's degree from Illinois State University. She is a Senior I Adviser. Her duties have changed with this new title, but she still will spend part of her time in the Home Economics area as in the past.

Serving as the Unit Educator in Crops Systems is Missouri native, Marion Shier, who has been in Livingston County for 10 years. Previously he worked in St. Clair County for four years. Marion, also a Senior I Extension Adviser, coordinates programming in the crops area. Even though his title has changed, his duties remain similar to those in the past. Marion received his bachelor's degree in Agriculture from Missouri Western State College and his Master's Degree in Agronomy from the University of Illinois.

We will no longer have a youth adviser; however, we have a new position to work and grow with. This new position is being filled by Pat Bertsche, who assumed her duties on June 1. Her title is Program Coordinator. She will coordinate both the 4-H program and the HEA programs, will work 40 hours per week, and will not have teaching assignments. Pat is very familiar with both the HEA program and 4-H program, which will help us as we adjust to our change. She is an Atlanta, Ill., native but has lived near Flanagan for 34 years and has served as our part-time secretary and fair bookkeeper for the past several years.

Because of the successful Extension Referendum of Nov. 5, 1991, we are able to maintain a county office and fund these positions. Many counties have had to combine with one or more neighboring counties to have a unit office with only one Unit Leader, Community Coordinator and one secretary to cover the multiple counties.

75th Anniversary Article

On April 17, 1993, the Leader published a story about the 75th Anniversary of the HEA.

By Barbara Sancken
Copy Editor

The accomplishments of the Home Extension Association (HEA) have been many in the 75 years it has been active in Livingston County.

Established here on March 20, 1918, as the Livingston County Home Improvement Association and later known as the Home Bureau, the goal of the organization was to teach "healthful, scientific living" to women.

A group of women representing 13 townships laid out the groundwork and at the first organization meeting elected Mrs. Charles Froebe of Chatsworth president of the association.

Miss Florence Swan was hired as adviser and it was decided to purchase a Ford Sedan for $830.27 so she could travel around the county to teach homemakers the skills they wished to develop.

A bank balance of $1,500 was needed to have an adviser in the county. Donations from civic minded people aided the slender treasury but a loan of $800 was still necessary and was secured, signed by the members of the original board making them personally responsible. Members of that first board were Mrs. Froebe, Hattie Fox, Mrs. Edward Fox, Electa Whalen, Ida Tindall, Mrs. John Mies, Mrs. Bert Carter, Mrs. Della East and Mrs. F. J. Spaulding.

At the first annual meeting, held March 20, 1919, it was reported there were 403 charter members. The members voted against building a sanatorium in cooperation with other

counties and agreed to work to get one established here as it was felt the county needed its own facility.

By 1921 the members were responsible for placing hot lunches in 45 rural schools. Local units made a concerted effort to get at least one hot dish on the luncheon menu of every school child.

In rural schools all over the county, teachers and students prepared soup, hot cocoa, or stew on a hot plate, or parents in the district took turns bringing in one or more hot dishes, or soup or other foods were carried from home in fruit jars and heated in a pan of water on top of the room heater, or if no other facility was available, potatoes were baked inside the room heater door. The results were sometimes humorous, and occasionally tragic when a hungry child saw his potato fall beyond reach into the fire.

Home Bureau members were among the first to learn about the convenience of homemaking helps, such as Certo, which was introduced in 1922.

In 1925, the organization decided to sponsor a 4-H program to teach homemaking skills to younger generation.

The early advisers traveled over dirt and mud roads in Model T Fords or by horse and buggy to visit with farm families that read by kerosene lights, carried their water by hand and farmed with horses.

The farm and home advisers worked tirelessly to bring the availability of electric current to every farm home in the county — and to convince farm families that they needed it. With the coming of electricity, homemakers were taught how to best use this new resource to further enrich the lives of their families.

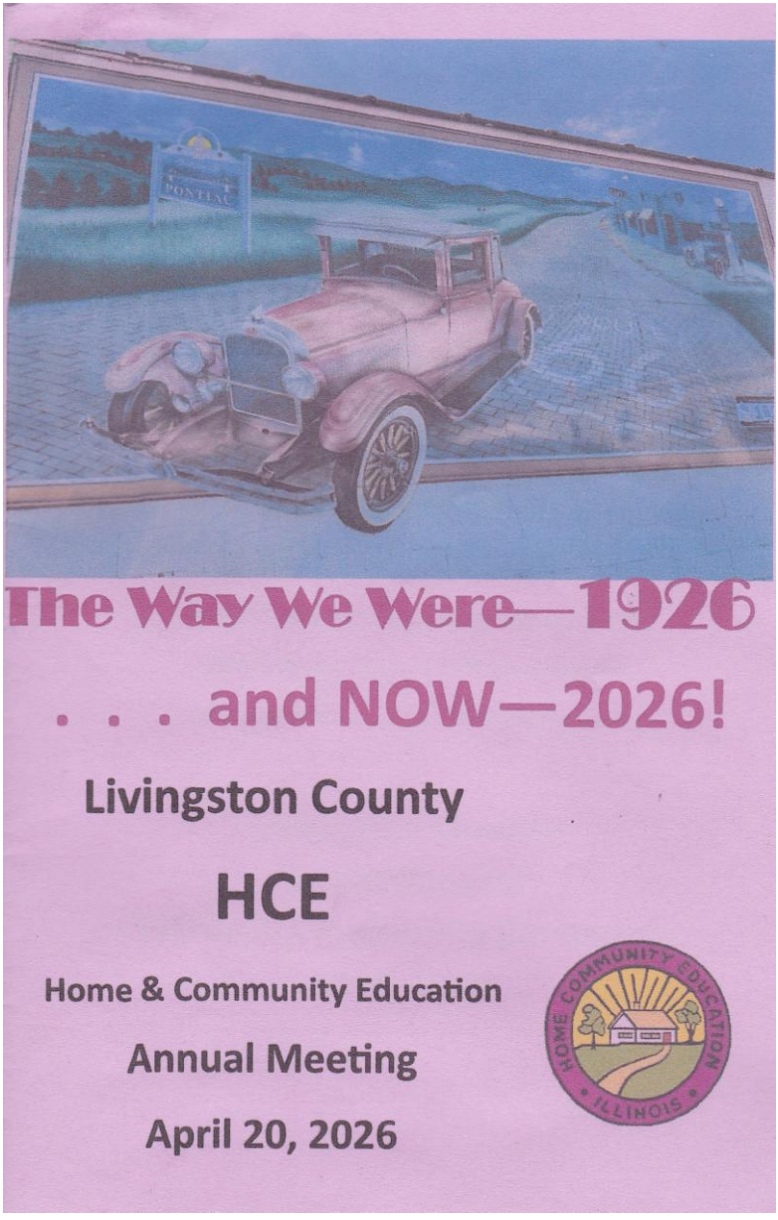
100th Anniversary in 2018

The Leader published the following story about the 100th Anniversary of the HCE.

> The Livingston County Home Community Education Association held its 100th annual meeting on Monday, April 16, at the Eagle Theater in Pontiac.
>
> Besides the regular meeting agenda, the group was visited by several special guests. After a quick wardrobe change, board members impersonated a variety of Livingston County HCE celebrities from the past including those that began the organization, wrote the "Aim of the Homemaker," state officers and University of Illinois Extension Home Advisers.
>
> Outgoing Livingston County President Linda Vercler introduced state President Jane Chapman, who installed the officers for the 2018-19 season.
>
> The board and each of the units had HCE historic items on display.
>
> After a luncheon, Bill Kemp of McLean County Historical Museum presented a program on Albert Cashier of Saunemin. African violets, the official Livingston County HCE flower, decorated the tables and were given as door prizes.

Group Decides to Disband in 2026

The group held their annual meeting on April 20, 2026. A copy of the program booklet is shown below.



Livingston County Officers

President.....Meri Knapp

1st Vice President.....Linda Vercler

2nd Vice President.....Linda DeRosa

Secretary.....Connie Kostelc

Treasurer.....Jean Gaspardo

Livingston County Board of Directors

Public Relations.....Lucy Wiechmann

Family Issues.....Shirley Meenen

International.....Shirley Meenen

Livingston County Association for Home & Community Education 1918—2026

HCE Meeting
Order of Business

Registration .....Pleasant Ridge Unit

Welcome...Cullom Unit: Meri Knapp & Linda Vercler

Invocation .....Pleasant Ridge Unit: Joan Haren

BRUNCH.....Decorations: Long Point Unit

Pledge to the Flag.....Linda Vercler

Homemakers Aim & Creed.....Linda DeRosa

Call to Order.....Meri Knapp

Roll Call of Units.....Connie Kostelc

Minutes of 2025 Meeting.....Connie Kostelc

Treasurer's Report.....Jean Gaspardo

Proposed Budget: 2026-2027.....Jean Gaspardo

Business.....Meri Knapp

>Nominating Comm. Report.....Jean Gaspardo

>Election Officers/Dissolution of County HCE Vote

Honor 50 Year Members.....Linda DeRosa

Recognize retiring board members.....Arlene Martell

Memorial Service.....Rooks Creek Starlighters

PROGRAM

Livingston County HCE
Minutes of Annual Meeting
April 21, 2025

The program was given on Tai Chi by Sara Attig from the extension office. She discussed how Tai Chi can reduce falls by 60%.

Prior to starting the meeting, members were asked to read the minutes from last year's annual meeting which were printed in the program book. The minutes were accepted as read.

The officers for the coming year will be President—Meri Knapp; First VP—Linda Vercler; Second VP—Linda DeRosa; Secretary—Connie Kostelc; Treasurer—Jean Gaspardo; Public Relations and CVH—Lucy Wiechmann; Family Issues, International, and Scholarship—Shirley Meenan. After a vote the officers were accepted unanimously.

The budget as stated in the program was accepted unanimously. Dues were listed as due on May 31. This delay is because we were unsure whether we were going to have to dissolve.

Those who have been members for over 50 years were acknowledged. These include Rita Schaefer who joined in 1951. Other members present exceeding 50 years included Arlene Martell, Sandi Kimpling, Judy Ehlers, Shirley Meenan, Linda Vercler, Ellie Bossert, Joan Haren and Phyllis Maddux.

There was a Memorial Service by the Long Point unit. It was followed by attendance awards and door prizes.

Submitted by Connie Kostelc, Secretary

Livingston County HCE
Treasurer's Report
March 31, 2025 to April 1, 2026

Beginning Balance April 1, 2025	$	3812.02
Membership Dues	$	1240.00
Memorials, Scholarships, Donations	$	270.00
Friendshiip Project Fund	$	57.93
Basket Raffle, Fair & Rada Sales	$	454.00
CD interest	$	339.14
Monies Available		6173.09
Expenses:		
IAHCE dues for 62 members @ $8 each	$	-496.00
Annual Meeting Expense	$	-536.85
Scholarships	$	-2000.00
Memorial Expense	$	-54.25
Conferences & District Meeting	$	-75.00
Postage & Office Supplies	$	-21.66
Super Saturday Expenses	$	0.00
Miscellaneous	$	-217.92
Friendship Project Fund	$	-57.93
Total Expenses	$	-3459.61
Balance as of March 31, 2026	$	2713.48
CD State Bank Graymont--Matures 9/12/2026	$	5000.00

Livingston County HCE
Treasurer's Report
Projected Budget for 2026 - 2027

		Projected Income
Membership Dues [62]	$	1240.00
Memorials to Scholarships	$	0.00
Friendship Project Fund	$	60.00
Basket Raffle Fundraising Fair	$	500.00
Interest from CD	$	200.00
From Assets for Operating	$	0.00
From Assets for Scholarship(s)	$	2000.00
TOTAL PROJECTED INCOME	$	4000.00

		Projected Expenses
IAHCE dues 62 members @ $8 each	$	-496.00
Memorial Expense	$	
Friendship Project Fund	$	-60.00
Annual Meeting Expense	$	-800.00
Scholarships	$	-2000.00
Conferences & District Meeting	$	-100.00
Postage & Office Supplies	$	-100.00
Super Saturday Expenses	$	0.00
Miscellaneous	$	-144.00
Univ of ILL Trust Fund	$	-300.00
TOTAL PROJECTED EXPENSES	$	-4000.00

Past Presidents

1918-1919	Mrs. Charles Froebe	Chatsworth
1919-1920	Mrs. Hattie Fox	Dwight
1920-1922	Mrs. John Mies	Avoca
1922-1925	Mrs. Henry Mieson	Pontiac
1925-1928	Mrs. S.L. Knight	Saunemin
1928-1931	Mrs. Merlin Strayer	Waldo
1931-1936	Mrs. Gordon Fillingham	Pontiac
1936-1937	Mrs. Maurice Phillips	Pike
1937-1940	Mrs. Clarence Brownsey	Dwight
1940-1944	Mrs. Lyle Husted	Amity
1944-1946	Mrs. Burkhart Hilti	Union
1946-1948	Mrs. C.R. Watters	Dwight
1948-1950	Mrs. Clarence Bennett	Chatsworth
1950-1952	Mrs. Lloyd Pampel	Rooks Creek
1952-1954	Mrs. John Beutke	Long Point
1954-1956	Mrs. Leonard Ketterer	Sunbury
1956-1958	Mrs. John Mortimore	Owego
1958-1960	Mrs. Leslie Mies	Fairbury
1960-1964	Mrs. Raymond Hanley	Union
1964-1966	Miss Chrystal Thompson	Rooks Creek
1968-1970	Mrs. Amber Shay	Sustaining
1970-1972	Mrs. Albert Klehm	Union
1972-1974	Mrs. Anthony Branz	Union
1974-1976	Mrs. Rita Schaefer	Rooks Creek
1978-1980	Mrs. Eleanor Bossert	Town & Country
1980-1982	Mrs. Coralee Utegg	Owego
1982-1984	Mrs. Gloria Zimmermann	Pike
1984-1986	Mrs. Eleanor Bossert	Town & Country
1986-1988	Mrs. Jean Ruff	Rooks Creek
1988-1990	Mrs. Gloria Zimmerman	Pike
1990-1992	Mrs. Pat Bertsche	Pike
1992-1994	Mrs. Mona Zehr	Rooks Creek
1994-1998	Mrs. Flossie Hillier	Sustaining
1998-2004	Mrs. Pat Bertsche	Pike
2004-2008	Mrs. Jean Ruff	Rooks Creek
2008-2012	Mrs. Marsha Weber	R.C. Starlights
2012-2016	Mrs. Joan Haren	Pleasant Ridge
2016-2018	Mrs. Linda Vercler	Cullom
2018-2024	Mrs. Arlene Martell	Long Point
2024-present	Mrs. Meri Knapp	Cullom

50 Year Members

Rita Schaefer	1951
Ellie Bossert	1965
Arlene Martell	1965
Elaine Hodel	1966
Sandi Kimpling	1966
Judy Ehlers	1968
Rogene Brady	1969
Lena Nickrent	1969
Joan Haren	1971
Shirley Meenen	1971
Evelyn Neuhalfen	1971
Marilyn Edwards	1972
Linda Vercler	1972
Marlene Fuoss	1973
Linda Nieukirk	1973
Lorraine Palen	1974
Phyllis Maddux	1975

Deceased Members

Carol Kaminke	1964-2026

The Aim of the Homemaker

By Juliet Lita Bane

To have every home—

Economically sound,
Mechanically convenient,
Morally wholesome,
Mentally stimulating,
Artistically satisfying,
Physically healthful,
Socially responsible,
Spiritually inspiring,
Founded upon Mutual Affection and Respect.

Homemaker's Creed

Keep us, Oh God, from pettiness; let us
be large in thought, in word, in deed.
Let us be done with faulty-finding and
leave off self-seeking.
May we put off all pretense and meet
each other face to face, without self-pity,
and without prejudice.
Let us take time for all things; make us to
grow calm, serene, gentle.
Teach us to put into action our better
impulses, straightforward and unafraid.
Grant that we may realize it is the little
things that create differences; that in
the big things of life we are as one.
And my we strive to touch and to know
the great common human heart
of us all, and Oh God, let us not
forget to be kind.

CHAPTER 10

Why Disband in 2026?

On April 20, 2026, members of the Livingston County Home Community Education Association voted to disband the organization after serving Livingston County for 108 years. The decision marked the end of one of the county's oldest educational organizations. The obvious question is: What changed?

The Original Need Disappeared

In 1918, there was no Internet, no television, no YouTube, and very few books in farm homes. Many women only had an eighth-grade education.

The Home Advisor was often the only source of reliable information on food preservation, nutrition, sewing, child care, sanitation, and household management.

By 2026, nearly every one of those subjects can be learned in minutes online.

Farm Life Changed

The early organization existed because farm wives lived very differently.

- no electricity
- no indoor plumbing
- home canning
- sewing clothing
- wood and coal stoves
- kerosene lamps
- large gardens
- raising chickens
- butchering

In 2026, many of those skills are no longer everyday necessities.

Women entered the Workforce

In 1918, many farm wives stayed home. By the late twentieth century, many women worked outside the home. Even retired women often had grandchildren, volunteer work, church activities, travel, and numerous other commitments. Monthly daytime meetings became harder to attend.

Other organizations filled the educational role

Community colleges
Libraries
Hospitals
Park districts
Senior centers
Extension websites
Facebook
YouTube

Thousands of educational opportunities now exist. Home Extension no longer had a monopoly on practical education.

The rural population declined

Livingston County today has:

- fewer farms
- fewer farm families
- fewer rural schools
- fewer township organizations

The audience for Home Extension naturally became smaller.

Success Created a New Generation

The organization taught women the following:

- Leadership
- Public speaking
- Committee work
- Citizenship
- Community service

Those women went on to lead churches, hospitals, schools, libraries, museums, historical societies, and countless civic organizations. In other words, HCE's influence spread far beyond HCE itself.

The World Has Changed

Ironically, many of the reasons the organization was founded had disappeared. The educational needs of 1918 were very different from those of 2026. Electricity, modern appliances, improved transportation, higher levels of education, and instant access to information through computers and smart phones transformed everyday life.

The Livingston County Home Community Education Association had accomplished the mission for which it had been created. After serving the county for 108 years, it quietly closed not because it had failed, but because the world around it had changed.

Recommended Reading

The 1968 booklet chronicling the history of the Home Extension group has been scanned and uploaded to Archive.Org for permanent preservation.

That document can be viewed and/or downloaded using the Internet address of https://tinyurl.com/n5ee62ym.

Author Spotlight

Dale C. Maley

Dale C. Maley is President of the Livingston County Historical Society and the Fairbury Echoes Museum. Dale is an expert on Fairbury, Illinois, history and has written over 390 newspaper articles and more than 30 books about Fairbury history. Both Dale and his wife are 5th generation citizens of Fairbury.

Also by Dale C. Maley

Fairbury and Livingston County History Books

1. Coal Mining in Fairbury, Illinois
2. Fairbury, Illinois and the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition
3. Fairbury History Stories Volume 1
4. Fairbury, Illinois from Prehistoric to Modern Times
5. Fairbury, Illinois in 1888
6. Fairbury, Illinois in the Civil War
7. Fairbury, Illinois in the World Wars
8. Franklin Oliver: Pioneer Settler of Livingston County, Illinois
9. History of Murders Committed in Fairbury, Illinois
10. Honegger's & Co. of Fairbury, Illinois
11. Livingston County Historical Society: It's Beginning and Some Later Years with Updates
12. The Great Chatsworth Train Wreck of 1887
13. The Founding of Fairbury, Illinois
14. The Goudy Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
15. The Kring Family of Fairbury, Illinois
16. The McDowell Family of Fairbury, Illinois
17. Walton Bros. of Fairbury, Illinois
18. William T. Stackpole of Fairbury, Illinois

19. William T. Stackpole's 1849 Journey from Illinois to the California Gold Fields